

Trends That Will Affect Your Future. . .

The Beingness Doctrine

| Stephan A. Schwartz |

The SchwartzReport tracks emerging trends that will affect the world, particularly the United States. For EXPLORE, it focuses on matters of health in the broadest sense of that term, including medical issues, changes in the biosphere, technology, and policy considerations, all of which will shape our culture and our lives.

Naomi Klein has written a book, *Shock Doctrine*, whose premise is that a formal strategy for forcing social change began evolving on the right as long ago as the 1950s, based on an extremist view of conservative free market capitalism.

As Eric Klinenberg wrote in his *Book Forum* review, “Why do so many nations have economic policies more *laissezfaire* and social programs less generous than their citizens prefer? Naomi Klein argues that the answer lies in a simple two-step strategy, honed over three decades by an international cabal of freemarket fundamentalists: First, exploit crises—whether due to economics, politics, or natural disasters—to advance an agenda that would never survive the democratic process during ordinary times. Next, create a ‘corporatocracy,’ in which multinationals and political leaders align to promote their interests at the public’s expense.”¹

In her extraordinarily well-documented work, Naomi Klein describes how the tactics of this strategy have now reached a level of sophistication such that in settings as disparate as Iraq and Katrina, it has forced change that would otherwise have been unacceptable through normal democratic processes. A change wrought under the guise of responding to some kind of social catastrophe, whether natural, like a hurricane, or man-made such as the early

policies under Paul Bremer in the first days of the occupation of Iraq. Klein points out that often this occurs with disastrous consequences, as anyone familiar with Katrina’s aftermath, or today’s headline on Iraq can see. If you have not read this book, I urge you to do so. It will give you a perspective through which much that seems chaotic and disconnected will be revealed as not only connected, but deliberate. The book is so disturbing that it forced me to consider if an alternative life-affirming strategy existed that had proven it could work. A kind of counter-*Shock Doctrine*.

I began by making a list of what I thought everyone would agree were significant progressive social evolutions in American society. This was my list:

- abolition
- public education
- penal reform
- women’s suffrage
- civil rights
- nuclear freeze
- environmental protection

The obvious thing they had in common is that they were all the product of nonviolence; at least that was the intent of those seeking the change. But, as I dug deeper I saw that underneath the obvious, and independent of political considerations, there beat a deeper drum, one that was rarely recognized. I saw that the most fundamental things all these changes had in common was that they had occurred as the result of a transformation wrought by what Gandhi called “beingness.”

In the last interview he gave before being assassinated, Gandhi was asked by a young reporter from the *Times* of India how he had forced the British to leave India. They had, after all, dominated the subcontinent for more than 350 years. Gan-

dhi had no army, no money to speak of, no official position, none of the trappings that normally confer authority and power. Yet, he had made the most powerful nation of his day leave its most valuable colonial possession. Before I read further in the interview, I thought, as you may be thinking now, that Gandhi would speak about his policy of nonviolence. But he did not, and his answer states the Beingness Strategy clearly.

“It was not what we did that mattered, although that was important. It was not what we said, although that too was important. What mattered was our ‘beingness’. The essence of who we were, that is what made the British choose to leave India.”

What, exactly, did Gandhi mean by beingness?

The answer to this very fundamental question, I think, lies in the nature of personal character and the tiny choices we make by the thousands throughout each day. Choices about clothes, food, courtesy, and a host of other seemingly unconnected expressions of intent that create not only our personal character, but collectively, the national character of the nation of which we are a part. The process can be seen clearly in the dramatic arc that made smoking socially undesirable in the United States in less than a generation. Smoking ceased to be fashionable because individuals made choices. When a critical consensus was reached, smokers became odd.

Because it is in essence about values, change based on beingness often begins—and continues driven—by religious and spiritual considerations. But religion qua religion is no guarantee whatever that values are life affirming, as the historic and

present day reality of hate and violence tied to religious fundamentalism makes so sanguinely irrefutable.

To my surprise, as I dug into the history of each of these historic transformations, I discovered that at the core of each was a small group of Quakers (formally, The Society of Friends). To get a sense of proportion about this, consider the percentage of the US population that is “churched.” That is, individuals and families who identify themselves as formally being members of a religious organization that meets regularly, and who participate in its activities.

- Protestant (all sects) 52%
- Catholic (all sects) 24.5%
- Jewish 1.3%
- Muslim 0.5%
- Quakers (Society of Friends) 0.0008%

In the whole of American history, from the colonial era to the present day, there have been a total of less than one million Quakers. Today, in a population of approximately 300 million, about 250,000 of us are Quakers. It is such a small faith that most people have never met a Quaker and never will, and few know anything about what they believe.

And yet . . .

If one works back to the headwaters of every one of the major positive social currents I have listed (and many more besides), one finds a small group of Quakers.

How could this be, I thought? How could this tiny group of people create movements that ultimately involved millions, and because enough people personally changed, made the change the new society norm? Studying the histories, eight laws—I hesitate to call them laws, but because they are constants in each case, I think they have earned the term—began to emerge. They were not at all what I had anticipated. Taken together, they constitute a proven Strategy of Beingness:

- law number one—the individuals, individually, and the group, collectively, must share a common intention
- law number 2—the individuals and the group may have goals, but they may not have cherished outcomes
- law number 3—the individuals in the group must accept that their goal may not be reached in their lifetimes, and be OK with that

- law number 4—the individuals in the group must accept that they may not get either credit or acknowledgment for what they have done, and be authentically OK about this
- law number 5—each person in the group, regardless of gender, religion, race, or culture, must enjoy fundamental equality, even as the various roles in the hierarchy of the effort are respected
- law number 6—the individuals in the group must foreswear violence in word, act . . . or thought
- law number 7—the individuals in the group must make their private selves consistent with their public postures
- law number 8—the individuals in the group, and the group collectively, must always act from the beingness of life-affirming integrity

So how many individuals are required to start? For an answer, I turned to the most prestigious prize in the world, the Nobel Peace Prize. Begun in 1901, it is the one award made from Oslo by a committee of five people. All the others come out of Stockholm. Why Alfred Nobel set it up this way no one knows, although it may be his sense of the differing measure of beingness he saw in his own culture at a time when Sweden and Norway constituted a single combined political entity. The award is not given every year, and in the 106 years since it was created, 95 individuals—former Vice President Al Gore being the latest—have been awarded the prize, nine of them women. Nineteen organizations have received it. Of the individuals, it seems to go to three kinds of people: government officials, hereditary and acknowledged leaders, and ordinary people who are committed to change. It is the regular folk who make up the third category who are the most interesting, because they illustrate clearly the eight laws of The Strategy. Consider the following award-ees:

The 1976 Peace Prize was awarded jointly to two Irish housewives, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams. Each was in her early 30s when, on a Saturday afternoon in August 1976, when along with a male friend, Ciaran McKeown, they founded the Community of Peace People. Both came from solidly working class folk in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Mairead’s

father was a window cleaning contractor, and her mother was a housewife. Mairead had been working since she was 16 in various clerical jobs, was proud of her shorthand, and had risen to become the confidential secretary to the managing director of a local company. Betty William’s life was much the same. Her father was a butcher. Like her friend Mairead, she was married, and she had two children, a son, Paul, and a daughter, Deborah. They had not prior experience as activists, and by their own admission, were hardly sophisticated in politics. But, they had had enough of the religious violence in Ireland and believed that even though they were utterly lacking in the sort of résumé one associates with political success, they could make a difference.

The 1992 Peace Prize was won by Rigoberta Menchú, daughter of an impoverished Quiche Mayan peasant family in which both adults and children went to pick coffee on the big, often-absentee owner plantations. Reared as a Catholic, she became involved in social reform activities through the Church, and while still a teenager, she became prominent in the women’s rights movement. By the time she was chosen for the Nobel, she was a leading advocate of Indian rights and ethnocultural reconciliation, not only in Guatemala but in the Western Hemisphere generally.

The 2004 Peace Prize was won by Wangari Muta Maathai, who was born in colonial Kenya. She was the first woman of all the millions who have lived in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree. After doing so, she went on to become head of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy. In 1976, she decided to address the deforestation of her homeland in the simplest and most direct manner. Eschewing government programs and large international aid organizations, she just got women to start planting trees. This simple idea developed into a broad-based, grassroots organization that, by the time she won the Nobel, had planted more than 20 million trees throughout Kenya—on farms, school lands, and church compounds.

So, there is a road to change that does not involve violence and exploitation, The Strategy of Beingness. The challenge

is it requires patience and real character, and you may not get the credit.

REFERENCE

1. Klinenberg E. It Takes a Crisis. *Book Forum*. September/October/November 2007. Available at: http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/014_03/846. Accessed November 17, 2007.

Stephan A. Schwartz is the editor of the daily Web publication *The Schwartzreport* (<http://www.schwartzreport.net>), which concentrates on trends that will shape the future, an area of research he has been working in since the mid-1960s. For over 35 years he has also been an active experimentalist do-

ing research on the nature of consciousness, particularly remote viewing, healing, creativity, religious ecstasy, and meditation. He is the author of several books and numerous papers, technical reports, and general audience articles on these topics. He can be reached via e-mail at saschwartz@schwartzreport.net.